

Barrington J. Bayley

An Annotated Bibliography

Andy Robertson

Barrington J. Bayley (1937-): underpaid, under-recognized, kobold who has been forging gems beneath the roots of British sf since the glory days of *New Worlds*. Occasionally emerges at sf conventions to drink a lot. He is considered a premier “ideas man,” though he has sometimes repudiated the label.

At their unconstrained best, his stories explore basic physical, philosophical and existential themes with great intellectual daring, often working in ancient religious and supernatural imagery with surprising effect. They are typically set in a very distant future with no real historical connections with the present, but with a recognizable or even archaic social structure, and they are very definitely novels of concept, not of character.

Bayley's kaleidoscopic cosmologies are carefully thought out, and almost disturbingly self-consistent and plausible. Oddly enough, I think that having a reasonable “conventional” scientific education only makes one appreciate them more. The science in most “hard sf” can be an embarrassment, not so much because it's wrong as because it is so obviously half-digested and regurgitated. But Bayley is most definitely (most definitely I say) an original.

Bayley has not produced a full-length novel since 1985, but he continues to publish short stories in *Interzone* and elsewhere. The time is surely ripe for another collection.

Star Virus (Ace, 1970)

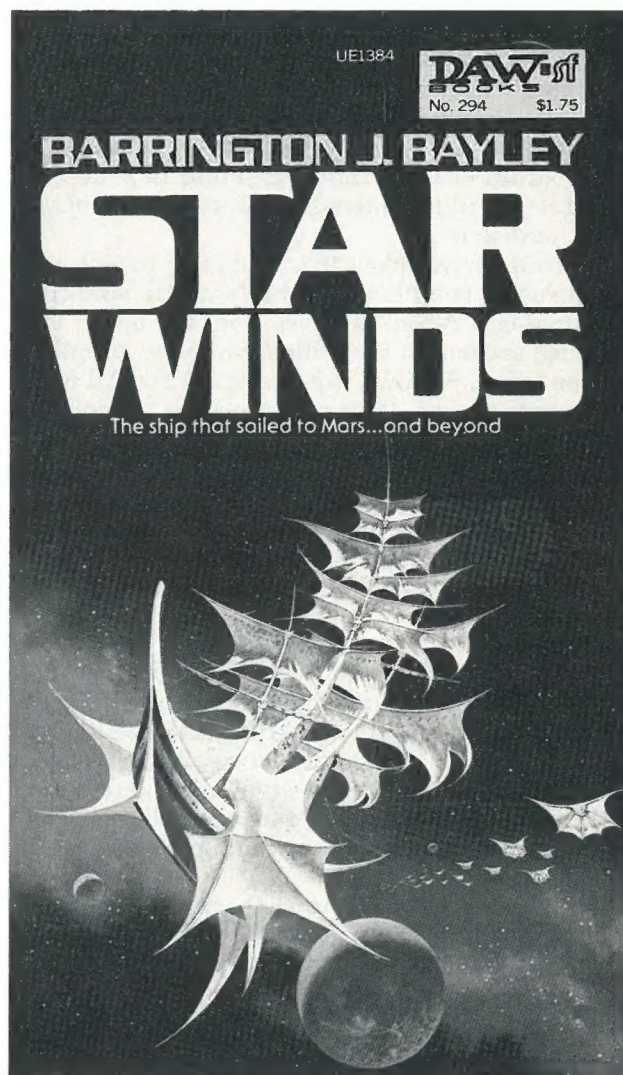
Novel. Some sort of existential barrier surrounds the Galaxy, and the swarming tribes of humanity seek to transcend it. Bayley's first novel, a meandering space opera with its good bits echt but rather thinly spread.

Annihilation Factor (Ace, 1972)

Novel. The Patch is wobbling about the galaxy, scarfing up all the conscious minds on any planet it encounters. How will the near-immortal aristocratic rotters who run the Empire deal with it? And why does anyone the Patch rejects turn into a particularly bolshy sort of Marxist? I don't understand either.

Empire of Two Worlds (Ace, 1972)

Novel. Fairly minor tale about gangsters from a dim, dusty planet who come back to Earth via some sort of matter transmitter and take over. It marks the start of a distinct fondness for writing about criminals and other low-life, perhaps mainly to act as thicko foils for the author's startling ideas.



Collision Course (DAW, 1973; republished as *Collision with Chronos*, Allison & Busby, 1977)

Novel. Bayley's first real corker. A complex, clogged book exceptionally rich with ideas. What defines the direction of time's arrow? And are there more directions than two? On Earth fascists experiment with crude time-travel, and those alien ruins appear to be getting suspiciously younger. Meanwhile (or rather, “meanwhile”), a Chineseian space culture which has long since mastered the manipulation of time looks on, and the Oblique Entity lurks near. Recommended.

The Fall of Chronopolis (DAW, 1974)

Novel. The great Empire of Chronopolis rules

the Low Women were moving together, chanting, stamping, working themselves up into a fury. Then they would rush forward and Om-at's people would run. Or they would die. Or maybe not. He hefted the stone in his hand, trying to pick out a good target, gave up and threw it at the group as a whole. He couldn't throw stones like Jar-don, no waz-ho-don could, but surely he couldn't miss so many females standing so close together...

The rock bounced off a female's head with a hollow sound and she fell to the earth, senseless.

Long moment of silence, then the Low Women shrieked their rage, ran forward as a single mass, almost as if they were a single animal. Om-at's people threw their stones, felling a few more, then beat the rest back with their long sticks, like a pack of hungry dogs.

This was a dangerous moment. Sooner or later, O-lo-a's waz-ho-don would pick up the rocks and start throwing them back, would find sticks of their own. The shock of surprise would wear off and then bad things would begin to happen. “O-lo-a!”

The two women began to move down the hill, walking slowly, filled with the sense of their own power, parting the mass of the Low Women, stepping forward to put things right. O-lo-a's pale eyes reflected moonlight better than most, making her look a little like a leopard. Pan-at-lee was a terrifying sight, dark and bulky, bigger than any of the waz-ho-don males. Smaller than Jar-don though. A lot smaller.

O-lo-a stood before him then, teeth exposed in an angry grimace, hands clenched in two hard knobby fists. O-lo-a was starting to get old. Not, however, so old she couldn't dispose of the likes of this puny male. “Om-at,” she said, words a male-like snarl.

And Pan-at-lee, towering over him, said, “Bad, bad, boy.” Those old familiar words, said to a long-ago child in that same deep awful voice, made his insides crawl.

Pan-at-lee, however, was only the Second Woman. Om-at's business was with the First Woman. He turned to face O-lo-a, hefted his big stick, getting a good grip, then broke it over her head, a loud splintery crack filling the night. O-lo-a went down, mouth open, and sat there, looking up at him, blood flowing from her nose, pale eyes stunned. He lifted the stump of the stick, intending to drive its jagged end into her throat...

Pan-at-lee screamed. Screamed and stepped forward, fist pounding into his face, crushing his nose. Om-at fell, rolling, white-light filling his eyes. He tried to kneel, to get back up, but Pan-at-lee kicked him, heel stamping into one kidney, filling him with nausea. He fell and rolled onto his back, staring up at her looming shape, realizing that he must have made a terrible mistake. Now...

Pan-at-lee's teeth showed in a terrible grin and she crouched, ready to leap on him and finish the job.

She took one step forward...Jar-don's fist bounced off the side of her head, knocking her down. She snarled, full of hot anger, and bounced to her feet. The fist again, putting her back on the ground. Then he kicked her flat. Kicked her again.

Pan-at-lee's soft mew of agony was a song in Om-at's ears. He struggled to his feet, groaning, holding his side, and stood bent over, waiting.

The two of them lay on the ground, beaten, looking up at Jar-don's man-shape, half-again the size of a waz-ho-don female. Jar-don turned and helped Om-at to step forward, arm around his father's shoulders, supporting him. Om-at smiled at the Low Women, smiled down at his mother, smiled down at O-lo-a's bloodied face.

“O-lo-a,” he said. “No-name.”

Fear dawned in the women's eyes then. It was to stay there for another two million years, until men and women would, at last, awaken to each other.

Author's Note: The astute reader will have recognized the Pal-ul-donian dialect of the Old Hominid Speech, used here as a tribute to its creator. Though somewhat fanciful, everything in this story is compatible with current anthropological theory. The tor-o-don represent *Australopithecus boisei*, into which I have merged *robustus* and *gracilis* as sexual dimorphs. The waz-ho-don represent *Homo habilis*, who may or may not have been our direct ancestors. No one knows what happened to these species, nor why they were succeeded by the *Homo erectus* people, who had the planet to themselves.

William Barton is the author of the sf novel *Dark Sky Legion* (1992), glowingly reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 62. His earlier books are *Hunting on Kunderer* (1973), *A Plague of All Cowards* (1976) and two novels in collaboration with Michael Capobianco, *Iris* (1990) and *Fellow Traveler* (1991). A freelance writer and computer consultant who has for many years been involved in the electronic publishing industry, he lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Once upon a time he read and enjoyed Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan the Terrible* (which is a hint for those who may be puzzled by the author's note above).

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